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Female politics in Parliament: addressing questions about political and journalistic representation

Abstract

This article draws upon the project "Feminine Politics" (PTDC/CCI-COM/102393/2008), which addresses political representation and media visibility strategies of Portuguese female deputies, across various periods of the Portuguese democracy, from 1975 to 2002. Three major parliamentary discussions regarding gender issues were taken as case studies, namely: the debate on equality and the universality of rights during the Constituent Assembly (1975); the debates on reproductive rights and abortion in 1984 and 1997; the "Parity Parliament", an initiative put together in 1994, which intended to raise awareness to gender inequalities in politics, considered to be the precursor of the parity law approved in 2006.

An integrated content analysis of the journalistic text and visual analysis of the photographs published in four Portuguese daily and weekly newspapers (Diário Popular, Diário de Notícias, Correio da Manhã and Expresso) was used to assess how the participation of female deputies during the three analysed debates was perceived and presented by the journalists. A total of 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with parliamentary reporters and female deputies, in order to explore media professionals and politicians perceptions regarding media visibility strategies and approaches towards gender issues. An historical evolution of the representativeness of female parliamentary deputies is briefly introduced to provide context and to strengthen the articulation we wish to demonstrate between political ideologies, progressive gender policies and press coverage framings.

Keywords

Journalism; Parliament; politics; feminine

1. Introduction and methodology

This article draws upon the research project "Feminine Politics"[1], intended to assess the representation of female members of the Parliament (MPs) and "gender issues" across four periods of the Portuguese democracy, spanning from 1975 to 2002: the revolutionary period (1974-1976); the Central Block (1983-1985), a governmental coalition of the two main Portuguese political parties; the "Cavaquismo" (1985-1995), during which Cavaco Silva headed a right wing government; and the "Guterrismo" (1995-2002), when the socialist António Guterres was prime minister. For each period we selected three case studies: the debate on the equality grammar and the universality of rights during the Constituent Assembly (1975); the parliamentary debates on reproductive rights; the "Parity Parliament", in 1994, intended to promote gender parity in politics.

An integrated analysis of the journalistic text and image, along with the reflexion based on contextual quantitative and qualitative data, allowed us to answer the following questions: How was the participation of female MPs at the Parliament translated into journalistic press discourses? How was the evolving role and representativeness of female MPs affecting their media coverage?

The research combines three methodologies, aimed to grasp multiple dimensions readings, namely in social, political and journalistic terms. We started with the identification and characterization of the universe of the female MPs that held seats, from the Constituent Assembly (1975-1976) until the XIX legislature (2009-2011), compiling the corresponding database and the production of a vast profile of women MPs and their political representativeness.

Two additional methodologies were used to analyze the press coverage, quantitatively and qualitatively, enabling the assessment of the representation of female MPs across the chosen newspapers for each political period. The journalistic articles were selected taking into account the identified case studies, including written and visual content.

We also conducted and recorded 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight parliamentary journalists and seven female MPs from various political parties, in order to track their impressions about mutual professional interactions and their vision about how gender equality issues are addressed through parliamentary initiatives and journalistic discourse. The questions addressed to female MP's were focused on their media visibility

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strategies and professional interactions with journalists, as well as their perceptions about journalistic framings concerning their own political work and participation. Parliamentary reporters were mainly questioned about their professional routines regarding issue relevance and political sources, and also their perceptions about the journalistic coverage of gender issues and female participation at the Parliament.

2. Female representation in the portuguese parliament since 1974: a brief historical perspective

Prior to April 1974, the political rights of women were limited in Portugal: in addition to important limitations in the exercise of the vote, few have spoken in the organs of sovereignty. The Portuguese women's social condition was characterised by great stagnation. The participation of women in political life as a historical, formal and institutional reality truly begins in Portugal following the Democratic Revolution of 1974 and as a consequence of the transition process to democracy.

Law shall be determinant for the consecration of the equality grammar – immediately following the revolution, through infra-constitutional legislation, ensuring women the right to vote without constraints and the accession to careers prohibited to them in the past (in diplomacy, judicature and local political institutions). Noteworthy is the pioneering role of the Portuguese Constitution of 1976, which comes to attribute equal civil and political rights to men and women.

In the last legislature of the "New State" (1973) the percentage of women elected to the National Assembly amounted to 6.1% (9 female MPs among 148 members, the greatest female representation in that organ during the whole period of Estado Novo – 1933-1974). In the Constituent Assembly of 1975, whose primary mission was to draw up the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, 19 women were elected MPs and a total of 27 performed mandate. This presence has configured an effective female representation in the Constituent Assembly – assessed regarding to the time of exercise of the mandate[2] – of 9.1%. The composition of the electoral lists

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[2] To deepen the study of representation of women in Parliament, we constituted a MPs database, with the aim of registering and characterize all women holders of parliamentary mandates between 1976 and 2011. In addition to the number of female parliamentary mandate holders, we measured the exact time each exercised the respective mandate, which allowed us to calculate the actual representation. The database of members is composed of a total of 583 entries, corresponding to each parliamentary mandate exercised by women, between the Constituent Assembly and the XI Legislature (2009-2011). Taking into account that several women performed more than one term as MPs, the 583 records correspond, in fact, to 331 different women.

for the Constituent Assembly of 1975 already denotes a purpose to integrate women, acknowledged the undemocratic character of the exclusion of women from the political institutions.

The influence of an international agenda pointing out the gender inequalities should also be highlighted, since 1975 was consecrated Woman International Year by the United Nations. Observing the period subsequent to the Constituent Assembly, between 1976 and 2011, 374 women were elected to parliamentary mandate in 12 legislative elections. Only in the legislative elections of 1987 the number of female MPs elected reached the number of female mandates achieved in1975, 12 years after the formation of the Constituent Assembly (19 mandates, 7.6% of the total elected).

In 1979, the appointment of Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo to lead a Government of presidential initiative (the V Constitutional Government) – the second female Prime Minister of Europe, after Margaret Thatcher – did not reflect itself, in the immediate years, as an inspiring factor for the increasing of female participation within formal political institutions (Martins, 2013). Moreover, only in 1985, a woman would integrate again in ten years a Government as a minister. However, the period previous to 1985 is a relevant one concerning the MPs activities, such as the discussion of the right to abortion and contraception.

Only in the legislative election of 1995, 20 years after the first free elections in Portugal, the percentage of female MPs elected surpassed the barrier of 10% (12.2%, corresponding to 28 mandates). In the following elections, this figure increased consistently, overcoming the level of 20% in the elections of 2005. Both 1995 and 2005 coincide with the beginning of socialist political cycles.

Within the scope of the project "Feminine Politics", we considered insufficient to restrict the analysis to electoral representation by sex, whereas it would be necessary to capture the dynamics of the functioning of the Parliament, with successive replacements of members throughout a parliamentary term.

The effective representation of women in Parliament is higher than the one achieved through elections. Actual representation shows that women overcame 10% of parliamentary representation already in the V legislature (1985-1987), the first term of a political cycle of 10 years of social-democratic majority. But, in convergence with the analyses carried out from the election results, it is from the VI parliamentary term (1987-1991) onward that the female presence in Parliament showed a consistent and consolidated uptrend, surpassing the 20% in 1999 and the 30% in 2005.
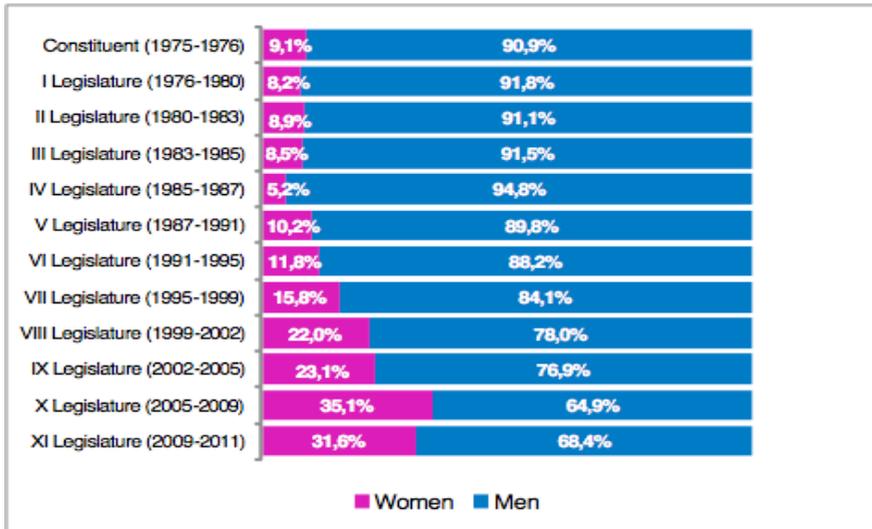
Figure 1: Effective representation of MP mandates holders, by sex,
from the Constituent Assembly to the XI Legislature (1975 to 2011)
N = 4549 (Total number of holders of MPs mandates from the
Constituent Assembly to the XI legislature (1975-2011); Men=3966;
Women=583)
Source: Project Feminine Politics

Public policies relating to gender equality and parity in this period were essentially driven by exogenous factors related to the country's integration in the then European Economic Community. Documents guiding European public policies naturally impacted on internal policies, such as the Community programs on equal opportunities for women. Other diplomas driven from internal policies focused in the grammar of gender egalitarianism.

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women had some impact on a national level, with the Portuguese Government endorsing the Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995). We emphasise the centrality of gender equality, parity and women's rights especially during the Socialist power cycles after 1995, which consistently is reflected upon the greater number of female representatives in political institutions. Presumably, the visibility of such matters in the public agenda, influencing the patterns of recruitment of political parties to the Assembly of the Republic. From 1995's onward, the leverage of female political participation in Parliament tends to coincide with socialist political cycles.
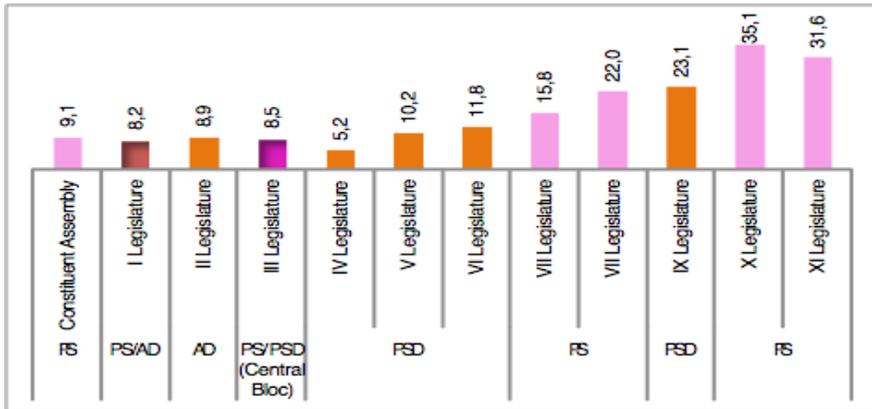
Figure 2: Effective representation of women MP mandate holders,
by political cycles (1975 to 2011)
N = 583 (Total number of women holders of MPs mandates from
the Constituent Assembly to the XI legislature (1975-2011)
Source: Project Feminine Politics

During the VII Legislature, in 1997, the fourth revision of the Constitution paved the way for the adoption of mechanisms for positive discrimination to encourage parity in politics. In 1999 it was submitted the first proposal for the introduction of a "quotas law". In 2006, the law of gender parity in politics was approved. It contributed to diminish the gender disproportion in the political arena, instituting a minimum of one third of candidates of both sexes in electoral lists in municipal, legislative and European parliamentary elections, with reflection on the results.

3. Gender equality and press coverage

In contemporary democratic societies, media are bound to fit the ideal of transparency and plurality. Normative media theories usually suggest roles or functions, including to monitor (power); to facilitate (argumentative dispute and legitimate political struggle); to radicalize (support change and reform) and to collaborate (with economic and political power).
According to Clifford G. Christians (2009, p. 32),

> the media do not operate in a societal vacuum but are continually engaged with other social actors as well as with their audience. The media can be differentiated in terms both of their relations with power in society (dependent or oppositional) and of their degree of participations as actors in political and social events.

The practice of journalism is never disconnected from the positioning of the practitioners in relation to a normative ideal, whose presence is felt more or less intense depending on individual motivations and sensitivities, editorial guidelines and newsroom cultures.

The in-depth interviews conducted along the research with eight parliamentary reporters working for various media (press, television, radio and national news agency), six female and 2 male journalists since the Portuguese parliamentary reporters community is highly feminized, revealed the importance attached to the translation of values in professional practice. Q.[3] works for the national news agency LUSA since 1998 and highlights:

> LUSA has greater obligations than other media outlets.
> The question of pluralism is essential. As a public service,
> we can not fail to cover events that others may leave out.

S., who joined the team of parliamentary reporters from public radio Antena 1 since 1996, emphasizes the respect for pluralism:

> We are concerned to give the point of view of all parties.
> There is a concern about the balance, without losing the
> newsworthiness criterion.

J., parliamentary journalist for 20 years, currently working for TSF, a private informative radio, points out the professional dilemma regarding the canon of objectivity:

> TSF has a blog called Politics Writing. When the idea came
> up, the direction wanted to do an opinion blog. I felt it
> would be difficult to maintain the distance. In what extent
> can I opine?

Herbert Gans (1980, p. 206) discriminates a set of interior "values" guiding journalists in their quest for the newsworthy "outer" reality and founded eight persistent and "enduring values": ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, pastoralism, individualism, moderation, social order and national leadership.

These values form a set of relatively crystallized ideas and create a structured journalistic framework. According to Gans (1980, p. 206), some derive from the reporters own sources of information: "The enduring values are part and parcel of news judgment; but even so, they are not, strictly

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[3] We will refer to the journalists interviewed through their first name initial and the name of their media employer.

speaking, professional values. They do not reflect technical expertise; rather, they are ingredients in a vision of the good society and nation".

It is important to retain two distinctive features of journalism - on the one hand, its apparent ideological affiliation to a progressive rhetoric and, on the other, its permeability to the values of "powerful" sources - to try to understand why an empathic goal as gender equality regarding women's participation and representation in politics, is so persistently perceived as lacking the relevance to attract the attention of parliamentary journalists.

S., a former parliamentary reporter serving the newspaper Público, corroborates how gender equality is such a minor item among the journalistic agenda:

> For years and years I have a great battle here in the newspaper: to fight for gender inequalities to be covered. Because it's something that no one cares.

Powerful sources are defined by its ease access to the media and the ability to create appropriate news. The institutionalization of Portuguese democracy restored the centrality of Parliament within the country political life. The dynamics and struggles drawn by election results were intensified and even dramatized and parliamentary coverage become an essential routine for political journalists.

The parliamentary reporters interviewed share the belief that editorial directors and political leaders rarely subjected their work to explicit constraints. The freedom experienced in the choice of topics and frameworks is a positively valued variable in the testimonies and one of the reasons given to explain why most of these veteran journalists enjoy their long stay in the Parliament, despite the notice of significant changes across time regarding the formats, content and channels of parliamentary news.

D., former sports journalist who joined the team of parliamentary reporters of the weekly newspaper Expresso, reports:

> In Express I had a week to write and I wanted to provoke things, create sections, track political commissions. In sports newspapers, where I started my career, one had to chronicle the game and another would make the cabins. What were the cabins? Cabins were the declarations behind the scene. I think I went to the Assembly to do the cabins.

S., reporter at the daily Público underlines the importance of informal spaces for newsgathering, if one seeks to do more than just to report the parliamentary agenda:

> It's a more reflective work (...) In addition to the plenary, there is a work that I would call to do the pools, which is to walk there in the aisles to see with who we are going to stumble. Because that's how you make parliamentary journalism: you talk to people and the news eventually flows. Like any other type of journalism based in sources, you have to invest a lot in conversation, often without any aim, but you feed a relationship so that one day, when there is news, it will eventually fall on you lap. Parliament was that for we, years around those corridors, around the chamber, to sit on the couch, waiting for persons, chatting...

P. started to do parliamentary reporting for the daily Diário de Notícias in the early 1990's and recalls the difficulties experienced when the newspaper, after privatization in 1992, began to compete for exclusive anticipated information:

> I went to the Parliament when Público was doing a very aggressive dynamic coverage and private televisions had just been born - SIC and TVI. Diário de Notícias was still very attached to the traditional coverage of Parliament, which was to do only what was happening in the plenary room. I started trying to find sources of information outside of plenary, getting first-hand information, anticipating things ... for a year I went through so much to get assert myself as a journalist within that space.

The multiplication of events, the diversity of topics covered daily and the urgency imposed by time routines force journalists to make a very pragmatic management of their sources of information.

F., parliamentary journalist working for the weekly Expresso, defines how he values deputies:

> Nobody can be an expert in Parliament because Parliament deals with everything. The most important is to have an informed representative telling me that what is in stake, what is their position and the position of the other parties.

In a complex environment, constantly changing, subjected to the unstable game of politics, where specialized information circulates abundantly, journalists need to establish relationships of trust with their sources of information, whose anonymity is protected with frequency.

J., political editor at Diário de Notícias, discriminates the qualities of what is considered a "good" deputy:

> They have to tell the truth. The confidentiality of the source is an agreement and implies a relationship of trust: I will not reveal the source of this story, but you just tell me the truth and nothing but the truth.

Gender rights, and especially its episodic manifestations in the political parliamentary discussion, with debates emerging in specific and scattered initiatives, rather than in a continuum provided by a stable commission, hardly allows anyone to arise as an issue specialist, provided with a strong technical background that reporters can rely on.

Instead, gender equality initiatives tend to be associated with personal believes and rejected by journalists on the basis that it lacks a broader public interest.

The visibility of the parliamentary protagonists is rarely founded on the logic of an individual crusade. Rather, the construction of a parliamentary career and the conquest of media visibility associated with the exercise of this position requires technical competence and recognized peer policy, fluency with specific themes within the political agenda and public intervention opportunities. The occupation of leadership positions, from leading the bench to chairing political commissions, are the main factors that journalists take into account when choosing their interlocutors.

John Corner (2003, p. 74) refers how the evolution of modern politics tends to position the politicians as members of an administrative elite, from who certain performances are expected under the appropriate institutional context, relegating to the background the figuration of the politician as *persona*:

> Insofar as political practice has become an exercise in managerial competence within broadly consensual frameworks of action, the status of politicians as part of an administrative elite rather than as agents of debate about principle and value is a significant shift. It reinforces a tendency towards an internalist (specialist, self-referencing) rather than public-oriented culture, the latter relationship being seen an increasingly the realm of auxiliary specialists, public and press relations advisors.

Digital journalism, the 24 hours news channels and social networks require constant attention from journalists, accelerating the need for the renewal of informative content and changing profoundly the routines of parliamentary journalism.

M., editor at Antena 1, refers to the type of parliamentary coverage carried out by television, in particular the 24 hours informative channels,

using live transmission and constantly asking deputies for reactions to all sort of themes and declarations.

> Televisions provide the shallowness of the reaction. And what is this reaction? Sometimes it is not the most important. In the television time it makes no sense to deepen an issue, it loses the rhythm (...) For cable TV, Parliament is a cheap stage. If television gave, I also have to give, the newspaper also have to give ... we all drag each other.

Media visibility of the MPs is affected and shaped by all these contemporary parliamentary trends coverage that we have been describing. It is becoming less attached to the assertiveness and effectiveness of their plenary interventions and increasingly determined by the attendance of television and radio programs, uttering short statements, recording sound bites and following leadership bench party leader's strategies.

P. refers to the increasing intensity and speed of reporting:

> Parliamentary groups have become much more professional and comment everything quickly (...) we all have less time to do in-depth research.

Corner (2003, p. 74) mentions two "spheres" whose good management is essential to achieve success in building a political career: the first plays with the skills to work within the institution and the political process qualities and is not directly mediated by the media; the second, which the author calls "public and popular", involves all dimensions through which a politician is seen as a "public figure", constituting the space of "demonstrable representativeness".

The same author (2003, p. 75) suggests that we may see the first sphere as "the workplace" and the second as "the store":

> Election periods will clearly produce phases of more intensive and more openly adversarial competition between *personas* and between policies as the significance of the broader sphere in relation to the narrower one increases (the "shop" temporarily becomes both primary and crucial).

Using this metaphor, we risk saying that female MPs, in general, do well in the workplace but rarely go to the store. Maria de Belém, socialist deputy since 1999, stated during the research-oriented interview:

> Politics is visibility and visibility has risks. The risk can easily turn into an accident. And an accident involving women has more journalistic visibility. Female errors are punished

> with a fierce scrutiny and even biased news (...) I have no
> visibility strategy for one reason: the normal strategy of vis-
> ibility of men in politics is to cultivate a very strong rela-
> tionship with journalists to whom they pass information.
> I just give my opinion when asked about political issues.

The lack of media visibility of women in politics, partially because they are systematically distant from leadership positions and greater public exposure, has not improved with the approval of the Parity Law in 2006. This perception is unanimous among parliamentarian journalists, as illustrated by the following statements:

> Despite there are more women within the parties, includ-
> ing a female President of the Assembly, we don't notice
> more political weight of women in this legislature. (J., TSF)

> You see more women in the stands, but we do not see the
> corresponding legislative process and there are even fewer
> female protagonists than before. (S., Antena 1)

> If we look at the names chairing the political commissions,
> they are all men. Which brings us to the same back ques-
> tion: quotas were implemented but women are not in the
> top spots nor in party leaderships, and the main debates
> and key tasks are not assigned to them. (A., SIC)

> I cannot explain why women remain in the shade. Men im-
> pose themselves when they are ahead of the parliamentary
> groups. They are always involved. Parliamentary leaders
> are very important, leaders designate who will participate
> in debates and designate who will stay ahead of all the im-
> portant commissions. (A., Visão magazine).

The public visibility of figures associated with certain causes is not a negligible factor in the context of democratic political struggle. Simons (2003, p. 173) argues that the process of building legitimacy is played not only at the level of governments and elites, but also in the realm of popular culture. The media are important elements in this process, for its ability to attract cross public:

> Political publics such as those who constitute the "chat-
> tering Westminster classes" or the Washington insider cir-
> cles must rely and engage in much broader media relays to
> secure popular consent (...) The principles of democratic

> government require competing political publics, howev-
> er narrowly defined they are in social terms, to immerse
> themselves in "popular reality" which is a democratised
> media sphere.

The ability to play this game in mediated democracy requires access to the media, but also a cultural capital and a genuine desire to communicate with citizens. The apparent aridity of the feminist agenda as it is articulated within the political and the journalistic discourse promotes its disconnection from the "popular reality", that is, from everyday community life.

The impoverishment of the public debate resulting from a distorted representation of parliamentary activities and protagonists is rooted on a set of reasons. We enhance the internal logic of political parties regarding the distribution of positions within the parliamentary bench, with a historical exclusion of women; the news values operated by journalists, which mimic the practices and figures of power, as well as their "truth telling practices".

Female MPs is a falsely unifying expression referring to an extreme diverse human reality. Ideological differences, partisan cultures and power positions are much stronger builders of the professional identity of deputies and nurtures of their paths, initiatives and vote orientations, than gender affiliations.

The Portuguese political parties have chronically uneasy relationships with their female subcultures. Margarida Salema, jurist, former MP elected by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and one of the mentors of the Parity Parliament, told during the research interview how this initiative to promote greater participation of women in politics was presented and negotiated in 1994:

> My contacts were always with the head of the parliamen-
> tary group. There were no discussions with women party
> militants because the PSD doesn't have any female struc-
> ture. The PSD has a quarter of women activists, therefore,
> the representation of them in the political organs of the
> party is very scarce.

The argument of women lacking political experience is often used to justify its removal from leadership positions or their lower willingness to cooperate with the media. But the quantitative data collected by this research project demonstrates that a very significant percentage of women elected to the Republic Assembly over 36 years of democracy (between 1975 and 2011), has extensive political experience. During the VII and VIII legislatures (1995-2002), with several years of European integration already elapsed

and, therefore, a greater familiarity with the vocabulary and the needs imposed by a gender equality policy, the variable of having previous political experience had already become greatly enhanced.
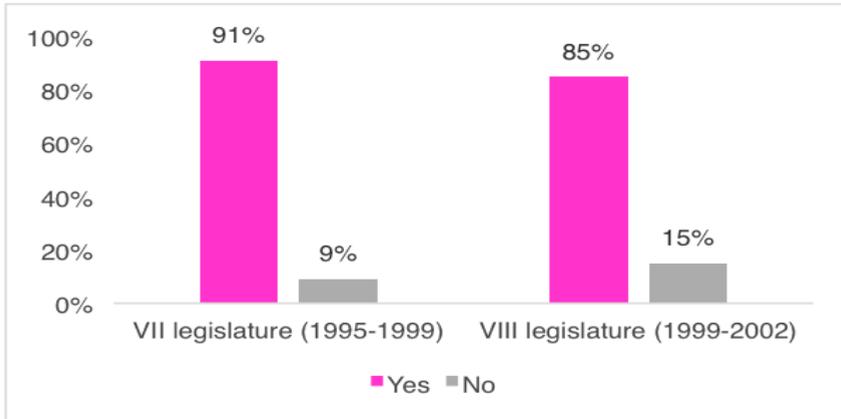

Figure 3: Previous political experience of female MPs during the VII legislature (1995-1999) and the VIII legislature (1999-2002)
Source: Project Feminine Politics

Data collected by the research project also shows that, in addition to the possession of political experience, professional experience and high academic qualifications, female deputies, in general, have a long parliamentary career, being successively re-elected. This trend cuts across all parties.

The poor visibility of their initiatives lies not in any intrinsic qualities of the group, but rather is due to most political parties' structural dynamics regarding the ways roles and power are distributed within the parliamentary bench.

The productive routines operated by parliamentary journalists to face their daily professional agenda are also part of the problem, and not part of the solution. Journalists tend to follow the "versions of the history" vaunted by the interlocutors appointed by party leaders and to engage into narrative frameworks emphasizing the typical values of partisan political dispute, namely, power struggle.

4. Images in focus: the photojournalistic coverage of parliamentarians

We envisage discourse as a social practice that not only shapes our understanding of the world but also positions each and everyone of us in a

social hierarchy of class, gender and power (Hall, 1984; Wodak & Meyers, 2001). Images are included in the concept of discourse and journalism is an important social institution that participates in the construction of social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1999; Tuchman, 2002), precisely through the power of mediation, using texts, sounds and images across a large social set.

Images play an important role in contemporary press and their presence have rapidly increased since digital processes were set in use in every Portuguese newsroom, changing newspapers designs in many ways (Mendes Flores, 2014). Contemporary cultures are bound to visuality and images became an indispensable communicative resource in a multiplicity of displays. There is a lasting tradition privileging vision in western cultures that was enhanced by digital technologies, favouring an effective crave for the visual, obliging researchers to take images into consideration (Mirzoeff, 2002; Mitchell, 2002; Jay, 1994).

With an historical overview, across the different political periods under study, this research intended to assess the ways men and women parliamentarians have been depicted in press photographs, considering photography's impact in the reproduction of social values and stereotypes, namely gender ones. For 'gender values' we assumed the different symbolic meanings assigned to each gender as their hegemonic identities under patriarchy, which were summarized by many authors (Goffman, 1979; Schouten, 2011). Visual representations of these values include the analysis of poses, looks and gestures, actions and scenarios represented in press photos as well as the textual context in which they are included, using a semiotic approach coined in the work of Roland Barthes (1984; 2008) and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuween (2006). We developed a mixed methodology, both quantitative and qualitative, applied to all photographies published in the newspapers considered in our study, found in news pieces concerning the debates on women's rights, namely, as was already mentioned, the ones concerning Abortion Laws and Parity Laws[4].

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[4] For quantitative analysis we set up a group of five major variables with multiple indexes concerning an amount of contextual and formal visual features, such as the presence of male and/or female MPs in the photos, the type of events represented and where they took place, the kind of actions and gestures represented and the type of relations to subtitles and titles, just to give the examples discussed as followsThe five major groups of variables were: 1. General Indicators: name of newspaper; date of publication; number of images published in the article; title of the article; gender event (Abortion or Parity discussions); 2. Image General Characterization: image type (cartoon, photography, illustration, infographics); page location; prominence of photo in the page; image authorship; image source; 3. Image Rhetorics: photojournalistic genre; image temporality; image/text relations; 4. Image Formal Analysis: type of framing; point of view; composition; focus and relation with spectator; 5. Image Content: characters portrayed (MPs, ministers, party members, others); number of characters represented;

We gathered 271 journalistic news pieces with 342 photographic images, from which 300 photos were published during the press coverage of the three legislative debates on abortion laws, whereas 42 concern parity legislation. These figures immediately indicate how media agendas valued the abortion issue and disregarded the parity question.

From the total amount of photos, 197 portrayed MPs, equivalent to 58% of the corpus. Considering our corpus is centred in parliamentary actors, an important number of photos portrayed other characters, mostly members of government and of the Catholic Church (in the case of the Abortion Law discussions). This indicates the prominent role of the government members in the press when compared to parliamentarians.

From the total of 197 photos with MPs, there are 5% less photos with women MPs: 68 photos (20% of the total) included women members of the parliament (represented alone, with other women MPs or with government characters or other characters); 87 photos (25,4%) included men members of the parliament (represented alone, with other men MPs, government characters or other characters) and 42 photos (12%) represented male and female MPs together.

Bearing in mind that there are less female than male MPs during the period of our study (1975-2002)[5], we may not state that women are under represented in the press photos under study. However, "being present" is not enough to understand the modes of representation. We must have in consideration *how* they appear represented.

About 27% of the photos portraying MPs only show faces, 35 male faces and 19 female faces, but when depicting actions (about 35% of MPs' photos) most of the pictures represent women and men MPs in the Parliamentary Chamber. However, in the case of men they also are depicted outside of the Parliament and involved in other actions besides addressing the Chamber, a rare case for women. Women MPs are often present in press photos because of their participation in the works during debate sessions and have little or no representation in "other" events[6].

gender of characters represented; gender of MPs represented; male or female protagonism; women visibility in the photo (main character; secondary character or shill); type of event; place of the event; public or private sphere of the event; name of character; political party of the character; type of gestures represented (indexes of facial and body postures were considered). Two independent researchers did codification and divergences were debated. No other reliability coefficients were considered.

[5] In average, during this period, there are 12% women MPs and 88% men in the Portuguese parliament (source: Feminine Politics Project).

[6] 21 photos show men addressing the chamber, while in 27 they are in "other" events. Women are depicted addressing the Chamber in 22 photos, however only 11 photos in "other events". This

We conclude that to hold a parliamentary mandate is more crucial for women's media visibility when compared to men, whom tend to be heard in other situations of their parties' life and are expected to be more influential than women in the same positions (Cabrera, Mendes Flores, Martins & Mata, 2012, p. 179).

The data shows the importance of the Parliament when it comes to the representation of women in leading roles. There is a difficulty of both men and women MPs to gain visibility when competing with members of government or Party leaders. Holding a powerful leading political position is one of the most common news values granting media visibility to a person. If leading positions are mostly occupied by men this will result in a major presence of male characters in political news. However, the expectation about the ability to influence other leaders also plays a role in photographic exposure. This expectation is influenced by gender and overcomes the simple holding of a powerful position (Cabrera et al., 2012, pp. 180-181).

One of the variables used to quantify differences in visual representation was the depiction of "protagonism" that tries to determine who is the subject or main character portrayed in a photo in terms of gender. The main conclusion is that male MPs lead in 25% of the photos (85 photos) and female MPs appear as main characters in about 18% of the cases (61 photos). These numbers change drastically if we consider all politicians and professions appearing in the photos and not only members of Parliament. In this case, 56% of all photos portray a male leading subject and only 27% a female one. Only about 7% of these photos portray equivalent leading roles of both men and women represented together. But when it comes to MPs photos this number of equivalent leadership declines for 4,3% (and 11 photos). Even rarer are the photos where women are leaders *in the presence of men* (2,3%, only 8 photos).

While figure 4 is an example of equality visually represented, figures 5 and 6 show male and female leaderships, respectively. These examples illustrate the cases where both men and women parliamentarians are depicted together in the same photo and give qualitative evidence to these later numbers about visual representation of leading actions. These exemples highlight the difficulties concerning equality portrayals.

In Figure 4, a woman MP is represented in the active role of speaking to a male counterpart. There is a balanced representation of leadership.

summarizes the results about the categories "Local of the event" (Chamber of the Parliament/ Outside the Parliament); "Event" portrayed in the photos (Addressing chamber/ meetings/ press conferences/other);

Although he is listening to her (usually taken as a more passive behaviour), composition and framing didn't detach her in anyway. There is a balanced representation of both figures. His posture, lining a bit towards her, also account for a connotative sense: the idea that he is "flirting" while she is speaking so enthusiastically. Transforming the political encounter into a romantic one devaluates her active posture by not taking her seriously. These connotative meanings are produced by the freezing of the action and induced by gestures and attitudes but also by the presence of the balcony behind them, that remind representations of courtesan love. The use of recognizable cultural *topos* makes images more meaningful and constitute the general framework of stereotyping processes (Huthamo, 2011).
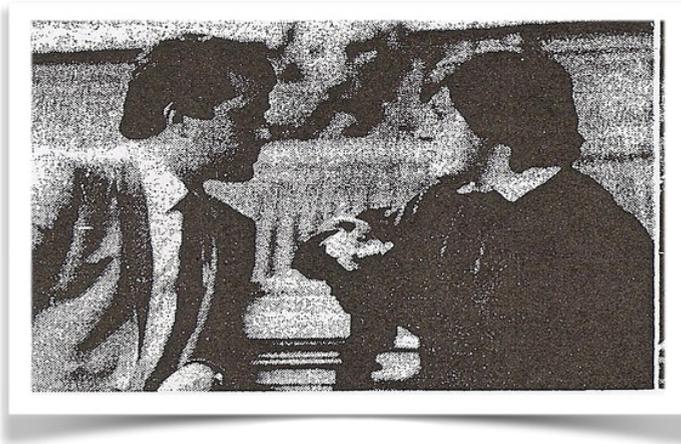
Figure 4: Diário de Notícias, 27th January,1984 Photograph by António Aguiar

Figure 5: Diário de Notícias, 14th February1997
Photograph by Bruno Peres

Figure 6: Diário de Notícias, 5th March, 1999
Photograph by Leonardo Negrão

In Figure 5, we considered the MP on the far right as the leader of the portrayed actions. Even if the caption gives leadership to the group, as the all group is the subject of the written sentence, composition and framing detach him. He was, in fact, at that time, the leader of the parliamentary socialist group. The line, constituted by the balcony, redirects our look towards him. On the left side of the image, the man turning his back towards the spectator produces an effect of re-framing that helps detaching the main character on the right. All men are looking at or interacting with him while the woman is pensive!

Both men and woman participate in the negotiations going on, but the leader is catching most of our attention also as a result of the vectors in the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) designed by the other participants' look (remark those in the background, that help conveying importance to the event in the foreground). In contrast, the female MP is with her eyes down: a gesture found quite often when considering female MP portraits, indicating a traditional image of modesty in patriarchal societies.

Another important aspect of this image is the way the leader is surrounded by the others: this was a major difference found in the visual representation of men and women MPs. Leadership is marked through "entourage". Women tend to be framed alone or cut out from action and represented interaction. Framing tends to isolate women, turning their images into conceptual descriptive images instead of narrative images

depicting actions and active subjects (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Numbers show 52 cases of "open framing" for men MPs, corresponding to 30 for women, while "closed framing" appear in 38 cases for female parliamentarians and 35 for men.

In figure 6, we have an example of a photo portraying a woman's protagonist among her counterparts, both men and women. This framing is very typical of leadership, representing the leader in the centre of the composition surrounded by the followers. However, in this case, the female MP is not being "followed" by those surrounding her, as they were depicted in a moment of distraction, thus underestimating her leading role. This turns out to be as if she is alone, the most common situation when it comes to framing women in the Parliament.

Typical frames of female MPs often detach them from context and isolates them from the group, thus transforming potentially "narrative images" into "conceptual" ones and turning women from potential leaders into objects of the gaze. In addition, the MP of figure 6 is portrayed with strange gestures and postures, thus making her *mis*placed within an (otherwise) common depiction of leadership.

5. Final remarks

To paraphrase the title of a Brazilian researcher article[7], the relationship of women MPs with the media has been "bitter". In all European democracies, constitutions and legal frameworks ensure the possibility of full participation of women in all spheres of public life. But, in practice, women remain on the margins of political institutions. According to Paxton and Hughes (2007, p.101), "the lack of visible women in the political life of nation after nation suggests that veiled discrimination against women remains".

The journalistic representation of female politicians plays an important role in the creation, within the voters, of perceptions and attitudes promoting a more egalitarian political praxis in terms of gender. Our study on visual representations of men and women MPs in press photos shows that there are less 5% of women MPs in the photos than men. We may not state, statistically, that women MPs are underrepresented when considering the events studied. But questions are raised concerning the ways women MPs

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[7] Maria Cecília Garcia (2002), "A Amarga Relação da Mulher com os Meios de Comunicação de Massa". In Schaun, Ângela (organizadora), *Género, Mídia e Sociedade,* Expressão e Arte Editora, pp. 11-21.

are represented when compared to male parliamentarians. Women parliamentarians are represented fewer times as the main characters of the actions portrayed in the photos; they are often framed isolated from context while men are shown with an "entourage" of followers; events such as addressing the chamber play a decisive role in the photographic visibility of a woman MP while men with equivalent status are less dependent on their parliamentary work, being able to attract the media on a larger sort of occasions and places.

The holding of important political positions within party structures, more often attributed to men, is a crucial news value as well as the agonistic and controversial relevance of political issues, usually assigned to men by their party's leaders. This contributes to a differentiated horizon of expectations among journalists that do not contribute to enhance women visibility and equality in the press.

The sophistication of parliamentarian political communication, able to produce and circulate news of potentially gruelling speed events, and the subordination of journalism at that pace, has generated, instead, a concentration of the protagonists only in the most well known faces, and the dominance of journalistic frameworks centred on internal conflicts and disputes, rather than on the social dynamic process.

These frameworks favour a growing partisanship and masculinisation of political debate as already noted by other authors (Abranches & Ferreira, 1986, p. 483). Several studies seeking to understand how journalism is changing points to a threefold dynamic: "tabloidization, technology and truthiness" (Zelizer, 2009). This trio of concepts reflects concerns about the increasing trivialization of content; changes in professional practices and values imposed by digital newsrooms; and the question of truth telling modalities enabled by contemporary political culture and reproduced by journalism.

Within a broader context of major journalistic diversions, parliamentary political journalism remains a sort of "oasis": speech is serious, factual, analytical, narrated with sobriety and accuracy. But there is nothing like a gender equality concern in parliamentarian journalism.

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